

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2852

EXDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR

DEPT PASS USCINCEUR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS IS LE
SUBJ: SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON

1. AFTERNOON JUNE 14TH ADEL OSSEIRAN, FORMER SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT, CALLED ON ME TO EXPRESS HIS CONCERN ABOUT CONTINUING TROUBLES IN SOUTH. HE SAID PEOPLE OF THAT AREA WERE REACHING END OF THEIR ENDURANCE AS RESULT CONTINUED ARTILLERY EXCHANGES AND ANARCHY WHICH PREVAILS IN REGION. WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE UNABLE TO GO OUT ON THE STREETS OF TYRE FOR FEAR OF BEING RAPED BY PALESTINIANS. CHRISTIAN FORCES AND ISRAELIS WERE CONSTANTLY BOMBARDING NABATIYAH AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES. PALESTINIANS WERE DESTROYING CROPS AND FIELDS. LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WAS POWERLESS TO DO ANYTHING. PEOPLE IN AREA HAD IMPRESSION THERE WAS PARTITION PLANNED IN WHICH CHRISTIANS AND ISRAELIS (AND BY INFERENCE THE UNITED STATES) WERE COLLUDING. SITUATION COULD NOT
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CONTINUE LIKE THIS. U.S. MUST DO SOMETHING QUICKLY. HE QUOTED PROVERB "THE REMEDY (THERIACA) SHOULD COME FROM IRAQ BEFORE THE LOVED ONE EXPIRES."

2. I REPLIED IN USUAL TERMS THAT, WHILE WE HAD SOME INFLUENCE WITH SOME OF THE PARTIES, THERE WERE LIMITS ON OUR POWERS AS WELL AS OUR RESPONSIBILITIES. LEBANESE

THEMSELVES BORE MUCH OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT WAS GOING ON AND THEY SHOULD ASSUME THOSE RESPONSIBILITIES RATHER THAN EXPECT OTHERS TO DO IT FOR THEM. I ADMITTED SITUATION WAS TRAGIC AND EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT OUR EARLIER EFFORTS TO CALM IT SEEMED NOT TO HAVE HAD PERMANENT EFFECT.

3. THESE TWO PARAGRAPHS SUMMARIZE CONVERSATION WHICH LASTED ALMOST AN HOUR AND WHICH TOOK ME BACK TO LAST FEBRUARY WHEN SUCH MEETINGS WERE DAILY OCCURRENCE. THIS MORNING'S REPORT BY OUR PRINCIPAL FSL INDICATES THAT OSSEIRAN'S RENEWED CONCERN IS COMMON TO PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH, WHO FEEL A NEW WAR COMING. OTHER SOURCES CONFIRM UNUSUAL INTENSITY OF ARTILLERY EXCHANGES IN NABATIYAH AREA AND, ALTHOUGH WE NOTE MESSAGES FROM TEL AVIV AND DAMASCUS TO EFFECT SITUATION QUIET, AVAILABLE INTELLIGENCE INDICATES INTENSIFICATION OF ACTIVITY ALONG BORDER. JUST HOW DANGEROUS IT IS IS HARD TO SAY. HUMAN CASUALTIES SEEM TO BE LIMITED, BUT INCREASED ISRAELI PATROLLING, ARTILLERY EXCHANGES, CHAMOUNIST AND CORRESPONDENT REPORTS REGARDING ISRAELI INTENTIONS, ETC., HAVE GIVEN RISE TO CONSIDERABLE LOCAL CONCERN AND SPECULATION THAT SOMEONE IS PROVOKING TROUBLE FOR BROADER STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS. WHILE LEBANESE NATURALLY LOOK TO ISRAELIS AS BEING RESPONSIBLE, AS SARKIS SAID TO ME JUNE 13, RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARTILLERY EXCHANGES IS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE. REPORTS FROM OUR LOCAL SOURCES INDICATE THAT THEY PROBABLY MORE RETALIATORY THAN PREMEDITATED, E.G., MARJAYUN FIRES AT NABATIYAH
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BECAUSE THE FORMER'S WATER PLANT HAS BEEN BLOWN UP, ETC.

4. TYPICAL OF LOCAL SPECULATION IS REPORT PALESTINIAN FSL HAS FROM CLOSE FRIEND OF ABU JIHAD (KHALIL AL-WAZIR) OF PLO THAT ISRAELIS PLANNING OCCUPY SOUTH LEBANON AS SOON AS CABINET FORMED. PALESTINIANS CALCULATE THAT IF SYRIANS INTERFERE THEY WILL BE PROMPTLY DEFEATED. IF THEY DO NOT, ASAD WILL BE TOPPLED. THEY BELIEVE U.S. HOPES FOR DOWNFALL OF ASAD BECAUSE OF HIS GOOD RELATIONS WITH SOVIETS AND THAT LEBANESE FRONT WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ISRAELI ATTACK TO ATTACK PALESTINIAN CAMPS IN BEIRUT AND REOCCUPY HOTEL DISTRICT.

5. WHILE THIS REPORT MAY SEEM FARFETCHED, IT IS INDICATIVE OF LOCAL SPECULATION. IN THIS CLIMATE OF APPREHENSION, LEBANESE ARE LOOKING FOR REASSURANCE AS TO ISRAELI INTENTIONS (HENCE PRESIDENT SARKIS' QUESTION AS TO WHETHER WE HAD DISCUSSED SOUTH WITH BEGIN), AND I SUGGEST IT IS TIME FOR ANOTHER ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

ON THIS SUBJECT WITH ISRAELIS AND SYRIANS. SPECIFICALLY,
IT WOULD BE VERY USEFUL TO HAVE UPDATED ISRAELI
ASSESSMENT OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN AREA AND REITERATION
OF GOI'S NON-INTENTION TO SEIZE TERRITORY ON LEBANESE
SIDE OF LINE OR TO PROVOKE ARMED CLASHES. IT WOULD
ALSO BE USEFUL TO HAVE INDICATION AS TO WHETHER
SYRIANS THINK PRESENT SITUATION SERIOUS, AND WHO THEY
THINK RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTINUED ARTILLERY EXCHANGES.
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